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ABSTRACT

Rural high school girls face a strong home-versus-career conflict stemming from traditional rural values and myths about women. They also face the reality of few local job opportunities, due to rural economic and value structures and to occupational sex-stereotyping. For the most part, rural secondary vocational education maintains its historically sex-stereotyped approach, channeling young women into traditionally female programs which leave them prepared for only the lowest-level jobs or for no paid work at all. Few rural vocational education programs offer a broad range of high level opportunities to all students. Most schools prefer to train students in generalized skills broadly applicable to local markets. Few rural vocational education teachers actively encourage women to compete in the male-dominated vocational programs. Even when women do compete, local employer and peer attitudes frequently exclude them from the labor market. Rural high school girls could benefit from re-education of rural vocational teachers and employers about women's potential and the development of sex-neutral educational programs, and from vocational education courses designed to help them develop realistic career orientations, consider non-traditional occupations, train as entrepreneurs, and use their skills for supplementary income. An appendix describes the methodology of the study. (SB)

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# "THEY'D NEVER HIRE A GIRL"

## Vocational Education in Rural Secondary Schools

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"THEY'D NEVER HIRE A GIRL"

Vocational Education in Rural Secondary Schools

> Those who have a home which they can make happy, will not sigh for contact with the outer world, to be permitted to wrestle and contend among its fierce trials and fiercer spirits that struggle there for daily bread; . . . or reject the gentle ties of wife, mother, sister, to study some learned profession, and rush into those haunts and paths already too crowded with the sterner sex. Such must be the lot, nevertheless, of many women, whom necessitous circumstances have forced into an unnatural position.
>
> -- New Cyclopedia of Domestic Economy, 1892

> "They'd never hire a girl. Most girls could not cope with getting under a car and getting cold in the winter. They wouldn't like it that most garages don't have adequate toilet facilities. . . . We need to give girls life skills. What this school needs for girls is a program in basic household skills -- basic cooking, so they don't serve so many TV dinners. There's a lot of that now, since so many wives work."
>
> -- Rural High School Principal, Southern New Hampshire, 1980

Much has changed in rural America in the last 100 years. But the paradoxes that dominate the lives of rural women have altered little. Rural women have always worked harder than their urban sisters; from nineteenth century women's magazines to twentieth century sociological studies, the report has consistently been of relentless labor in the house and in the fields. Simultaneously, however, the notion has persisted that rural women are too "gentle," too



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delicate, to take on productive work outside the home. Even today, there is a strong sense in many rural communities that the good woman finds her fulfillment as a wife and mother, and that only "necessitous circumstances" should propel her into the labor market.

Parts of this conception are breaking down in the face of changing rural life styles and a changing American society. Farming is no longer the common rural enterprise, and the need for women to work as unpaid farm laborers has therefore diminished. Mass media and the interstate highway system have whetted the appetites of rural people for consumer goods and urban amenities, appetites which, in many cases, can only be fulfilled by a second income. Rural women, to varying extents, have come to share with their urban counterparts a desire for the kind of independence and self-actualization which comes with a career outside the home. And the general pressures of inflation, increasing energy costs and modern family instability have forced many rural women into the labor market, whether they want to be there or not.

But if parts of the old conception of a "woman's place" have broken down, other parts appear to remain intact. "Necessitous circumstances" have come to be more broadly defined, and a wider range of women now feel that they can or must go out to work among the "fiercer spirits" of the opposite sex. But, for many rural women, "contact with the outer world" has compounded the paradox, not resolved it. The majority of non-farm rural women are now adding wage-earning labor to their home responsibilities. They are permitted by a liberalized society to keep house, tend the garden, raise the children, help their husbands, and bring in a portion of the family income, besides. But they are still not supposed to compete with men for jobs with higher wages or more autonomy, nor are they encouraged to expect their husbands to share in the household tasks that a wage-earning wife leaves behind.

This situation presents a clear challenge to vocational education program planners. Since rural women are entering the labor market in ever-increasing

numbers, they will need training which will help them get and keep the jobs they want. But this is not a simple enterprise. A good vocational program for young rural women needs to cope with a variety of competing forces: the pressure of traditional community value structures; the polarization of rural labor markets; the concerns of rural women about their own capacities. To provide occupational training for country-bred women without considering the multiple demands which impinge upon them is to render a disservice. Out-of-context programs will only provide their recipients with an illusion of access to meaningful and productive work. Rural women deserve more than illusions.

This paper is intended to provide a context for thinking about appropriate vocational programs for rural women. It considers the present status of rural women, at home and in the labor market; examines typical vocational education programs intended to meet their needs; and proposes ways in which secondary schools could provide more appropriate occupational preparation for their female students.

The conclusions in this paper are drawn from a woefully small data base. Few fields are less thoroughly researched than this one. The literature on rural women is meager, as are the studies of rural vocational education. Even where rural vocational education studies exist, they deal almost exclusively with men, treating women only tangentially, as a not particularly interesting sideline. Statistics have been compiled -- by the states and by major research enterprises like the National Longitudinal Study -- on program participation and outcomes for rural girls, but they have not yet been analyzed or interpreted. An extensive search failed to unearth a single specific study of vocational education programs for rural women.

This discussion is based on a review of the sparse existing research, augmented by data from two sources: the 1976-78 "Profile of Occupational Interests" (POI) study, a multi-regional study of rural high school students in

five parts of the U.S.; and some informal interviews conducted early in 1980, which tapped the views of administrators, counselors, teachers and students at eight secondary schools in Vermont and New Hampshire. For the latter data-gathering exercise, schools were chosen to represent a variety of types within the geographical constraints imposed by limitations in time and money. (See Appendix I for a more complete description.) They covered a range of sizes, levels of commitment to vocational programs, local availability of jobs for vocational graduates, and degrees of metropolitan influence on community life. Perceptions drawn from these data are suggestive rather than conclusive, but they indicate some possible trends and some promising directions for further research.

* * *

*"The boys call me Annabelle Hatchet," she announces with a proud grin, "because I was cuttin' down trees faster than they were. We make the guys in here look sick!" Janet is in the first year of a two-year Vocational Agriculture program at her regional high school in Vermont. She is one of five girls in a class of twelve. Her teacher encourages girls to do the same work in forestry, logging, sugaring, horticulture, dairy production and farm management units that boys do, and is delighted with Janet's performance. While he concedes that "some employers might be prejudiced," he urges girls to take pride in their achievements; he says, "I tell a girl: you've got it -- you sell it!" He, too, notes that Janet's skill with an ax is superior to some of the male students'; in fact, her swing has become somewhat legendary, and even the principal talks about it.*

*Janet is scornful of her classmates who are "just in for credit." According to her, two of the girls and "some guys" fit that description; she speaks with pity of the girl who "even lives on a farm and couldn't tell the parts of a chicken on our test last week." Janet herself takes such tests seriously. She signed up for Vo-Ag because she helps care*

for livestock on her father's small farm at home and she "wanted to learn about diseases. Say you got a sick calf; you learn what to do for it . . . . If you got trouble at home with an animal, this'll help you figure it out." She is particularly interested in horses; she has broken and trained several, and plans to earn money by giving trail rides this summer.

Janet's two best girlfriends also enrolled in Vo-Ag because they like caring for animals; one would like to have a pet shop someday, and the other dreams of living "on a ranch out West." But Janet's plans are more specific: she knows she wants to farm in Vermont. Her father, grandfather, and great-grandfather have all been farmers, and she is the only one of eight children in the family who wants to continue. She has been paying particular attention to the coursework in farm management, "keeping accounts and all that"; she expects this to be useful in her future because her father "thinks he knows it all already." And though her father has given her a few acres, she doesn't really want to stay around his place. "I want to get my own place," she says firmly, "and build it up."

Janet's boyfriend has other ideas. He thinks she should settle down and raise a family when she graduates next year; then he can support them working as a trucker. While Janet would like to have kids, especially because "they would help with chores," she wants the farm first. "I figure," she says, "if girls settle down and raise a family, they won't do what they want to do." She doesn't want to be "tied down to kids -- kids take a lot of money." She also knows that children would be a time-consuming responsibility; she speaks with horror of the way she's seen babysitters treat kids, and says she would never leave any of her own with hired sitters. She's not so

*sure she could care for kids and run her farm while her man is out driving a truck, but she sees a solution. "I think," she says hopefully, "that he'll come round to farming. I think I can get him round to farming."*

* * *

The Lives of Rural Women: Dealing with Dilemmas

It is difficult and dangerous to make broad generalizations about any group of women -- and about rural women, perhaps, most of all. There are more than twenty-five million of them, and they are extremely diverse, representing every race, ethnic group, social class, and economic situation. They are made more diverse than urban women by the geographical insularity which has maintained unique rural sub-cultures in an increasingly homogeneous metropolitan nation. The POI research found that regional differences among women were as significant as differences among social classes, and even between sexes. This kind of variation makes global assessments suspect. Nevertheless, as a group, rural women do have some common tendencies, recurrent qualities with which the educational policy planner must grapple.

There are implicit contradictions in the lives and attitudes of most groups of women, but rural women seem to have carried these contradictions to an extreme. The myth of womanly delicacy and the fact of female competence are both embedded in rural culture, and both emerge as factors when women plan their lives. For example: rural women are very family-oriented, and tend to be quite traditional in their view of the appropriate roles of wives and mothers (Flora and Johnson, 1978; Dunne, et al., 1978). They perceive themselves as "helpmates" to their husbands, attentive mothers to their children, good neighbors who help friends and relatives in difficult times (Dunne, 1979). They are not particularly interested in legislated equality; Larson's (1978) review of the literature on rural attitudes found that more than half of the nation's rural women feel that ERA is either unnecessary or inappropriate.

At the same time, however, rural women are very career-oriented. They have high educational aspirations and, generally, high achievement levels: the average educational level of the white rural woman is equal to that of her urban sister and her male counterpart, while minority rural women generally acquire more schooling than minority men (Fratoe, 1979). Further, the young women tend to plan extended work lives and often aspire to careers which would require extended commitment, such as veterinary medicine, accounting, and business management (Dunne, et al., 1978).

This would not be paradoxical if two different age groups were under consideration here -- if, for example, older women saw themselves as traditional homemakers, while younger women were eager for more "liberated" lives. But this does not seem to be the case. The census statistics indicate that increasing numbers of rural women in all age groups (including the young mothers in the 20-34 category) are moving into the labor force in record numbers (O'Leary, 1979). And a group of women, recently convened by Lyndon State College in the remote "Northeast Kingdom" region of Vermont, called the problem of re-entry homemakers one of the most pressing issues facing the female population of that area.

Further, the younger rural women seem very nearly as traditional in their orientation as their mothers and aunts. The POI research found that high school girls expected to work, but that they also expected to run their households single-handed (Dunne, 1979). In fact, they expected less help from their husbands than their male peers declared themselves ready to provide. Our interviews confirmed the survey findings. Nearly every girl interviewed planned to work and to manage a home with little or no help. "The man would feel awkward," one girl explained. "It's the way you're brought up. Girls do dishes, boys do wood and garbage." Some of these young women expressed some ambivalence about the traditional division of roles, but most expected that

custom would triumph. As one girl put it, "A husband should help, but I don't think mine will. It depends on what he's like. He might be lazy, or tired from work. I will too, I guess, but it's got to be done. Mostly, it'll be me . . . he probably won't." This young woman has no particular husband in mind; she is reflecting her expectations of men as a general group.

Thus, rural women of all ages seem to envision themselves as both wage-earners and homemakers, with little expressed consideration of what this combination is likely to cost them. The Lyndon State College conference indicated that older women tend to be less likely to construct a fantasy in which they put up twelve quarts of tomatoes in the morning and perform brain surgery in the afternoon, but they seem to have equally little sense that it is difficult to simultaneously be a full-time wage earner and a full-time homemaker, especially in the rural context, where services are scarce and most human endeavors require extended travel.

The homemaker/worker issue is not the only dilemma with which rural women must deal. Their actual position in the labor market confronts them with another paradox. When young rural women talk about working, they speak of jobs as a source of satisfaction -- according to the POI research, to a far higher degree than young men (Dunne, et al., 1978). There is no apparent reason for this attitude. In spite of their high educational attainments, in spite of their high aspirations, rural women are concentrated in the least satisfying jobs available to humankind, in terms of stimulation, responsibility, or income. O'Leary's (1979) study found that fully 25% of rural women are employed as operatives in non-durable manufacturing -- jobs in processing plants of various kinds which represent some of life's most tedious and unpleasant occupations. Further, these unattractive jobs are not redeemed either by high pay or the prospect of promotion. According to O'Leary (1979), the mean earnings of full-time rural female workers in 1976 was only $6,590, half that of their male

counterparts and $1,000 less than their urban sisters. And women are likely to end their work lives where they began them: at the bottom of the career ladder. As one Business teacher in a northern New Hampshire town said, "All jobs for women in this area are minimum wage, no matter what their education or experience. There is little chance for advancement. Women bank tellers have been there 10 and 20 years without a promotion. A man will work there less than three years and get moved up."

The young rural woman, therefore, seems to be boxed in before she makes her first move into the labor market. She has learned to want a productive career; she has learned to want to be a fine, supportive, responsible wife and mother. She has learned to look for satisfying work for part of her identity; she has learned that women cannot hold those kinds of jobs. In this context, it is not surprising that rural girls have diffuse, sometimes contradictory notions about what they will do with their lives. It is only surprising that they manage to plan at all.

The Status of Rural Women in the Labor Market: Reasons and Rationalizations

The unenviable position of women in the rural labor market has a number of sources. First, the rural economic structure tends to be relatively simple and undiversified (Cosby and McDermott, 1978). In addition to farming -- traditionally a male preserve -- most rural communities offer one or two primary employers. Characteristically, these major employment opportunities are highly sex-stereotyped: mining, fishing, logging, and heavy machine industries hire men, while textile factories, food packing plants, and plastics companies hire women. When the local industry hires both males and females, the jobs tend to be segregated within the organization (Teal, 1980). And, almost invariably, the "women's jobs" offer less pay, fewer chances for promotion, and less autonomy than do the jobs held by men. This means that, in most rural communities, women have either little chance for employment, or abundant, low-level opportunities. In our interviews, we

asked, "Where do the women around here work?" and the responses were consistently dismal: "Part-time, in menial jobs"; "At the rubber plant"; "At the plastics factory." There were few equally consistent answers for men, even though their labor market is limited by the constraints of the rural economy as well.

Some of the sex-stereotyping of occupations comes from the nature of rural work. Many of the stereotyped "men's jobs" require a great deal of physical strength which women either lack, or are presumed to lack. One rural principal pointed out in an interview that "a twenty-five year old man is going to be able to lift more than a twenty-five year old woman, on the average," and that this difference is significant in a logging camp. The emphasis on strength in several rural occupations encourages sex-stereotyping, and discourages women from considering male stereotyped occupations which women might find readily manageable.

Although some rural jobs have qualities that encourage sex-stereotyping, most occupational polarization stems from community and employer attitudes (as it does in metropolitan areas), rather than from anything inherent in the job itself. Even the most optimistic of vocational teachers see real problems in the marketplace for the unconventionally trained. One Vocational Agriculture teacher, who takes a very positive approach towards training and placing women in agriculture-related fields, still feels he has to hedge his hopeful assertions: "If the employer is somewhat up-to-date, he'll hire a girl. A girl has as much chance as a boy to be hired today. But . . . the employer might be prejudicial. He might like a boy in mechanics -- figures he's had a car, fooled around with it -- where he might hire a girl in horticulture or something." Most of the teachers, administrators, and students interviewed were far more pessimistic. Many agreed with the young woman who said, "No girl would be hired before a guy, no matter with the situation. My father owns a garage and he would never hire a girl, even if she was the best in the class."

Employment -- in traditional or untraditional occupations -- does not end the working rural woman's problems. Access to transportation, to child care, to stores and services is more difficult for rural women than for their urban counterparts. The lack of adequate day care is particularly acute in some rural areas. In central Vermont, one teacher told us, many mothers "go on welfare instead of working because they don't want to leave their kids alone," but can't find a reliable person to look after them. Traditionally, rural women compensated for scarce services and poor transportation through a mutual support network (Flora and Johnson, 1978). But the old custom of "neighboring" has begun to break down, as its membership moves into the workforce. A young mother can't take her neighbor's kids after school if she works the 3 to 11 shift at the local nursing home; Mom can't cook for her daughter's husband and children if she waits on table at the resort every evening. Thus, many rural women are forced to choose between poverty and family neglect -- a painful decision for any person, and a heartrending choice for the family-oriented country woman.

Finally, the external problems posed by the nature of the rural labor market and the scarcity of services in the country are exacerbated by the internal problems of rural women's attitudes towards their own futures. Although teachers and counselors feel, as one put it, that "attitudes are changing -- there's more career orientation today," marriage remains a priority for young women, and traditional rural values compel the marriage-oriented young woman to be ready to drop career plans at any point. Since many do not know who or when they will marry, they tend to perceive uncertain futures, dominated by the random whims of fate. As a result, one vocational coordinator says, high school girls talk about careers, but actually "think in terms of a job," which is sporadic and limited. "Boys think in terms of extended careers." Even young women with substantial ambitions see marriage as an impediment to success over which they have no control. One high school junior, who says that she wants to be a social worker,

was asked what factors could stand between her and her goal. "Getting married," she replied, promptly. "If I get married first, I can't go on to school." This tentative attitude towards the future may be one reason for the low aspirations some guidance counselors perceived among their female students. There is little point in investing time, money, and emotional commitment in training which might have to be abandoned at any moment. It makes more sense, as one assistant principal notes, to "latch on and get married," while in high school. Then, at least, a girl can feel (however temporarily) that something about her future is determined.

* * *

*"I love this stuff!" cries Jill, waving her hands at the bustling children of the Quantity Foods Program during lunchtime. "I love all of it -- learning about cooking, serving, the management. It's really, really interesting." Quantity Foods is a two-year program, but Jill enrolled in her senior year. "I wish I'd gotten into this earlier," she says. "I wish I'd started before. I would have loved to go on."*

*Now, however, she feels it is too late; she is five months pregnant. "Now that I'm married, with my baby coming -- well, I'll stay home after the baby comes." She thinks she might work sometime, maybe after her child goes to school, but she has no definite plans. She doesn't think she is qualified to do much in food trades, in spite of her enthusiasm for her current course. Two years ago, she was enrolled in the Office Occupations program, but dropped out of school and has only returned to finish this year.*

*As evidence of the real potential of the Quantity Foods program, Jill points to two of her classmates, two young men who plan to start their own restaurants after further training at Culinary Arts institutes. "They're really going to do well," she says. "I mean, I love this, but I didn't start soon enough. But at least I'll be able to cook for my family."*

* * *

Vocational Programs in Rural High Schools: The Basics

Federally-funded vocational education for rural youth began in 1917, when the Smith-Hughes Act authorized the expenditure of $7.2-million for occupational preparation. In the countryside, these funds were focused on two programs: vocational agriculture, which got fully half the allocated funds; and home economics, whose funding was split with the more urban-oriented industrial arts programs. Since 1917, five more acts, each with subsequent amendments, have succeeded the Smith-Hughes legislation. But the primacy of VoAg and Home Ec programs in rural secondary schools has never been challenged.

Today, when only 11 percent of rural residents are engaged in farming and when 49 percent of rural women are in the labor market, this emphasis seems odd. But traditions are strong in rural schools and the communities that support them, and several high school teachers and vocational directors voiced sentiments similar to those of the New Hampshire principal who said, "The community is fond of the Aggie program, refuses to change it. We've been FFA champs 11 times in 13 years."

Furthermore, both Agriculture programs and Consumer and Homemaking Education courses have been modified over the last ten years, in response both to the constraints of the job market and of Title IX. Some of these changes are access-oriented -- one school, for example, revised a rule that barred girls from the Future Farmers of America club; another renamed the cooking classes "Culinary Arts" in a successful effort to recruit young men. Other modifications were more engaged with content. In some schools, the Home Economics programs (as they are still called in most rural schools) have devised classes to prepare young people for restaurant or institutional cooking occupations. Agriculture programs have broadened their focus to the point where the national FFA can claim that since one-third of the jobs in America are agriculture-related, Agriculture is the natural omnibus vocational program. Whether or not that claim seems plausible, it is clear that many VoAg programs are broader than they once were. In addition to the dairying and forestry programs characteristic of northern New England

agriculture programs, schools selected for this study offered, under the general rubric of Vocational Agriculture, everything from greenhouse management to small business practices. As a result, in part, of these changes, there are places where the high sex-stereotyping typical of these programs has broken down. There are some female students in most VoAg programs, and some boys in particular Home Ec classes (such as Culinary Arts). Nevertheless, the tendency towards single-sex courses persists. Since, in many schools, these two programs are the dominant form of occupational preparation, they establish a model for occupational sex-stereotyping which mirrors and reinforces the stereotyping tendencies of the community.

If the Smith-Hughes Act laid the foundation for sex-stereotyped vocational education, more recent legislation has unwittingly encouraged it. The Vocational Education Act for 1963 (and its amendments through 1976) was intended to encourage the achievement of sex equity. However, as Rosenfeld (1979) has pointed out, the means of program evaluation has encouraged the maintenance and development of inequitable programs, especially in traditional communities. As long as vocational education programs are judged by the number of graduates they place, the best guarantee for success is to prepare young men and women for the kinds of jobs traditionally considered "sex-appropriate." To mount unconventional programs is to court failure. Given the limitations on the training capacities of secondary-level vocational centers, this kind of evaluation has a particularly negative effect on the training of women. Many of the higher-income women's occupations (such as nursing or elementary teaching) require training beyond the secondary level. But, as one Home Economics teacher complained, she hesitates to encourage her better vocational students to go on for more training, because "going on to school is not placement," and entry-level placement is the gauge of success. This form of evaluation works against young men in some instances, too, but the entry-level positions in the typical "men's occupations" are generally superior to those available to women, and therefore the effect on men is not as great.

Beyond VoAg and Home Ec: Polarized Programs and the Myth of "Nice Mix"

In the small rural high school, the vocational programs are restricted in both size and scope. The smallest schools selected for this study (with total enrollments ranging from 100-261 in grades 9-12), tended to offer only two or three programs: generally the standard Vocational Agriculture and Home Economics package, plus either Business Skills or some form of Industrial Arts. Larger schools, especially those who draw students to their vocational programs from very small high schools in the surrounding area, offered more programs, frequently adding courses of study in Distributive Education, Child Care, Machine Tool Drafting, or Food Services to the standard array. The Area Vocational Centers, with their federal funds and broader selection of students, tended to offer the standard programs plus courses requiring substantial investment in equipment, such as Building Trades, Metal Trades, Printing and Graphics, Auto Mechanics, and Health Occupations.

It is clear that students at the larger and more specialized schools have more choices in vocational training. But it is equally clear that, in sex-stereotyping terms, those choices are nearly as polarized for the student at the Area Vocational Center as they are for the young person enrolled in a tiny rural high school.

This situation is not uniquely rural. As Rieder (1977) points out, vocational programs nationally "faithfully mirror the occupational segregation by sex in the labor force." But rural women, already embedded in an extremely sex-stereotyped culture, seem less likely than their urban sisters to hurdle the barriers protecting male-dominated occupations. Thus, highly polarized training opportunities are very likely to accentuate the channeling of young rural women into the most traditional female jobs. Several vocational staff members noted that it is very difficult to persuade girls to enter unconventional programs. One vocational director attributed this difficulty to "sex biases of the family

and inadvertent sex biases of the staff." Others, including students, singled out the peer group as a particularly powerful force in maintaining traditional sex-role lines. Virtually every teacher and counselor interviewed had stories of girls who wanted to try Auto Mechanics, or Forestry, or Agriculture, "but her boyfriend vetoed it," and there was substantial agreement that unconventional enrollments required peer approval and support. "It's difficult to get them started," one counselor commented. "If they had a friend or a few girls in it, it would be okay, but they're afraid to intrude on male territory on their own."

For the girls who stay in their "own territory," the opportunities are very limited. The "Office Skills" courses generally offered by small high schools prepare their graduates for only the lowest level clerical positions. In many places, these graduates are readily employable; school personnel tended to agree with the guidance counselor who said that "a lot of companies like rural students and their high moral values." But the jobs they get -- as bank tellers, bookkeepers, typists in small offices -- do not lead either to advancement or good pay. Employers like to hire polite, hard-working rural girls, who wear skirts instead of blue jeans and get to work on time, but they don't like to pay them more than minimum wage. There are good jobs, even within the clerical field, for which these young women could be trained, but a lone Business teacher would be hard-pressed to provide the kind of advanced training required for legal, medical, or executive secretaries. Further, even if such training were provided, the local labor market could not absorb such specialized personnel.

Health Care programs are similarly limited in the skills they can teach. The well-paid jobs, the jobs with mobility, all require post-secondary training. The graduate of a secondary health program is employable only in low-level, dead-end jobs. While there are also limits to the employment opportunities for graduates of male-stereotyped secondary vocational programs, they are both broader in range and more lucrative than those for women.

Business and Health Care programs prepare their graduates for low-level work, but the alternative female-stereotyped programs prepare most of their students for no paid work at all. Home Economics, which is not considered a vocational program by the federal government, is named as the primary vocational resource for girls by the high schools visited. The teachers in these programs have frequently made significant efforts to make their courses relevant to the interests of their students -- male and female -- but their reforms have led them toward studies that are more likely to enhance the quality of life than the quality of income. A number of Home Economics teachers interviewed have launched successful "Marriage and the Family" courses, which have the tendency, as one teacher put it, "to change a lot of minds about getting married right after high school -- they begin questioning when we come to the part about budgeting." Others have career orientation and life planning units build into the curriculum. This kind of learning undoubtedly has a useful function in women's career development, but it does not provide the high school graduate with marketable skills.

Child Care programs, which are technically occupationally-oriented, do not appear to be much more likely than Home Economics courses to enhance employability. Rural communities rarely offer formal day care programs (even though many need them badly), and the typical Child Care program does not offer the small business management training that would be necessary to enable a young woman to start a Center of her own. Thus, many of the young women enrolled in such programs agreed with the girl who said, "I knew I wanted to be a mother and I thought this program would prepare me." Only a few harbored visions of starting Day Care Centers or Well-Child Clinics, and they did not seem to have the practical expertise to realize their dreams.

Thus, the young woman enrolled in the traditional female-oriented programs finds herself trained either for a low-level job or for no job at all. Those

who want more must go on for further education, or they must "rush into those haunts and paths already too crowded with the sterner sex," and compete with boys in male-dominated vocational programs.

Some do. But, the data suggest, not many. According to a statistical analysis done by the NOW-sponsored Project on Equal Education Rights (PEER), in 1978, women constituted a maximum of 20 percent of the enrollments in traditionally male-dominated programs -- and that level is achieved only in Michigan and Washington state. In the more rural states, the percentages range from 5.2 percent (Arkansas) to 9.48 percent (Vermont), both below the national average of 11 percent. Further, these figures include post-secondary vocational training, which tends to draw more women into non-traditional programs; the percentages are probably lower at the secondary level.

These statistics were supported by our interview results. While there are some programs, particularly in Agriculture, which have high proportions of girls, most of the traditionally male sequences are overwhelmingly masculine in enrollments and in what some teachers and administrators call "flavor."

In this context, a girl has to be either highly motivated or rather frivolous to enroll in a traditionally male program. Among the young women interviewed, there were both. The highly motivated generally had very specific plans for the application of their skills. Several of the girls in Vocational Agriculture said they were planning to take over family farms. Others believe that a male-dominated occupation is the best route out of a constricting environment. "I'd like to go to different states and different corporations," one female Metal Trades student said. "I want to get into bigger places, see the world." This kind of vision seems to give some young women the capacity to focus on an attractive future, enabling them to ignore a present in which they are often teased by the boys, sometimes condescended to by the teachers, and occasionally actively discouraged by the response of their communities. "Everyone in my town was really shocked,"

the outwardly mobile Metal Trades student said of her decision to enter the program. "My parents thought at first that I was really out on a limb, taking too much on. Now they say, 'Just so long as you're happy.'"

Those girls who enrolled in non-traditional programs for frivolous reasons seemed willing to ignore their own capacities to do the work required. Two girls in a New Hampshire high school's Building Trades program said they picked that sequence because "our boyfriends were taking it and our friends said we wouldn't dare." Their teacher declares that "in many cases, the girls are outperforming the boys," and the vocational director of the school says, "Those girls are tough -- perfectly willing to deal with physical challenge." But the girls themselves reject any notion of using their skills to earn a living. Besides, "it gets us out of school in the afternoon." As one said: "There's too much prejudice around here to choose a man's job. I've heard too many stories about how women are treated."

It is clear that polarized programs have built-in problems for young women, whether they follow the traditional or the unconventional training route. It would seem logical, therefore, to create more sex-neutral programs which would offer a broad range of relatively high-level opportunities to both sexes without requiring young women to surmount barriers which do not face young men. This, however, is easier to propose than to implement.

At present, only a handful of programs -- Distributive Education, Food Services, plus an occasional Business course and Printing or Graphics sequence -- ever has what vocational directors like to call a "nice mix." And even this mix is often illusory. Within the "well-mixed" programs, students are often re-segregated by sex: in a typical Business program, for example, the typing and shorthand courses will be entirely female, while the accounting and management classes have more males. This re-segregation reflects different visions of the future. As one Business teacher said, boys take Business courses "mostly for

their own personal use -- to keep books in business." The girls look to office skills for their livelihood; the boys, on the other hand, see these skills as a useful tool in a more complex occupation.

These differences in perception persist even when boys and girls take the same classes. Food Services programs are frequently mentioned as a "well-mixed" program, often predominantly male, but with women moving up in the enrollments. But the girls who enroll in these programs tend to have very different motivations from those of the boys. In one group of students we interviewed, the boys reported plans to "have my own restaurant," and "to open my own place -- something seasonal," while the girls said they had enrolled in the course because "I couldn't cook at all," or because they wanted to prepare for married life. Thus, there is polarization even in the most apparently sex-neutral programs.

Creating genuinely mixed programs appears to be difficult, especially in conservative rural areas. Several vocational administrators mentioned strong community resistance to the notion of neutral programs or "program clusters," which would attract mixed enrollments and then train for a broad variety of occupations. One vocational director said that he has been trying to put together a cluster of programs around the theme of "Protective Services," including police, firefighting and security guard preparation. But the community resisted the notion. "It's easier to sell the community on traditionally male occupations," the director said. "It's difficult to get the community to go along with the cluster concept. They figure it's the man who will have to earn the living." This sentiment was echoed often. "The town wouldn't go for a (sex-neutral) program," one Business teacher said. "They only go for stereotyped male occupations." This teacher, and the vocational director cited before her, come from very different communities -- one relatively urbanized, and in the midst of a diverse labor market; and other very rural, with only two large employers. But both have one thing in common; the bulk of women in the region are employed.

Twenty years ago this was not true. But community attitudes have not changed with the labor trends, and the belief persists that where resources are scarce, the training of women is a luxury.

Sex-neutral programs are also difficult to mount because they tend to be specialized in nature. It is very easy for a program which prepares for a narrow range of jobs to flood a rural region with its graduates. Its own success can drive a program out of business. Programs in printing and graphics, for example, show promise for mixed enrollments (many are dominated by one sex, but that seems to be a function of the program's history, rather than of stereotyping in the labor market), but their graduates may have to leave the community to find work. For some young people, out-migration is a cherished goal; for others, it is an undesirable consequence of obtaining vocational preparation. One vocational director thought that program rotation might be a reasonable way to deal with this problem. Programs could run for three to five years, and then would be replaced with another specialized training effort. There are problems with this model. Equipment costs might prove prohibitive; teachers might have to be replaced. Further, students who want a particular kind of training would have to hope that they were the right age in the right year. "It's hard on a kid to say, 'Oh, you want to go into health work? Sorry, it's a year too late for that,'" a vocational director said. It seems, in many schools, that it makes more sense to train students in generalized skills which have broad applications within the local labor market.

Someone concerned with enhancing the position of women in the rural labor force might well conclude that the most promising route is to encourage female enrollment in traditionally male programs. This is the strategy used in most of the schools visited for this study. While vocational directors and teachers tended to bristle at the notion of "head-hunting," or "trying to force a girl into Auto Mechanics just for a statistic," many of them are making active efforts

to recruit girls into non-traditional programs and to provide them with the appropriate support system (primarily other girls and co-op placements) to help them make it through. One guidance counselor mentioned a colleague at an Area Vocational Center who makes a routine practice of pointing out girls in non-traditional programs when he guides groups of prospective students through the school. "It backfired recently," she said. "Some sophisticated fifth-grade girls suspected him of being sexist because he kept pointing out the females in the programs."

In spite of the pressures of Title IX legislation, and in spite of the efforts of the sex equity coordinators, a number of factors -- other than an overt desire to achieve equity -- seem to affect non-traditional program enrollments among women. Schools in areas which have experienced in-migration from metropolitan areas seem to draw more women into non-traditional programs than those which have remained more homogeneously rural. Programs tended to be more mixed in those schools surveyed when the schools were near a city, or when they were in a resort region which had drawn metropolitan families in search of the "good life." One principal in the latter type of district suggested that the cross-enrollments tended to come from the new families. "It's mostly French Canadians and northern Yankees around here," he said. "The family is a strong and important value. That's the way it is -- in order to keep a strong family, you need the female in the home." It is the more "socially liberal" families, he added, who encourage their daughters to think about careers For the long-time residents, "the goal is for the woman to get married and have a family."

Cross-enrollment also seems to vary with the local availability of actual jobs to which the training applies. In the ski country of central Vermont, for example, there is a reasonable market for trained restaurant cooks. Thus, there is a real incentive for young men to enroll in Food Service programs. In the schools we visited, the existence of local jobs appeared to have a more immediate

impact on cross-enrollment of males than on females, but it seems evident that perceptions of what jobs are appropriate for males and females can be altered by changes in the job market.

The Critical Complex: Teacher/Student/Employer Attitudes

The most important factor affecting non-traditional enrollments appears to have nothing to do either with the make-up of the local population or the availability of jobs. It has to do with the interaction of teacher, student, and employer attitudes, which can vary from school to school, even within very similar districts. It is important to look at these attitudes as a complex. A single instructor can have an impact on cross-enrollment, but it is unlikely to bear fruit unless the employers are prepared to hire women trained in traditionally male skills. Further, the employers are often influenced by the teachers in a variety of ways which will be described below. Finally, the peer group can influence its members either to accept or reject non-traditional training, and the attitude of the peer group is affected by teachers as role models and by the experience of older siblings and friends as they have entered the labor market. For the purposes of discussion, it is possible (and probably necessary) to break down the complex into its components. But as they exist in the real world, they are engaged in a constantly changing interaction with one another.

Instructor attitudes appear to be pivotal in the development of student response. We found, for example, some Vocational Agriculture programs which were evenly split between males and females, and others where the males outnumbered the females by more than 40:1. The well-mixed programs invariably had instructors who actively encourage female enrollments; the single-sex programs had teachers who are tolerant of women at best, and openly biased against them at worst.

One Vocational Agriculture teacher, whose classes are consistently half female, attributes his success to the "girls in the past who have recommended it to their friends -- my biggest publicity is through the kids." In view of his

attitude towards women, this chain of recommendation is not surprising. "I like to see girls in the program," he says. "They add a lot. Girls like the greenhouse a lot, and they work out in the woods -- love sugaring." Not only does he welcome them into the program, he also maintains an abiding faith in their employability as graduates. "I personally believe that a girl has an equal chance of being employed if they have a positive attitude when applying," he says, and the girls in his program reflect his belief that there is room for them in agriculture-related enterprise.

In the last few years, this teacher has modified his program in an attempt to broaden the job prospects of his graduates. "My idea is to expose them to many areas, so they can see what they like. We used to be mostly dairy production, but then I diversified and the enrollments increased." Some of these diversification efforts specifically enhance the job prospects of the female students; horticulture, landscaping, and work in the USDA dairy and blood labs involve work which is likely to seem female-appropriate in the communities around the school. But all students are enrolled in the same courses, and he makes no effort to steer female students towards certain interests. His students say that he treats boys and girls as equals, and expects them to participate equally in all aspects of the program -- from the woodlot to the greenhouse.

This instructor was not unique, even in our limited sample of schools. But his attitude seems to be less typical of teachers in male-stereotyped programs than was that of another VoAg teacher, whose program is the only vocational alternative to Business courses in his small, remote school. Like the first instructor, this teacher attributes his enrollment pattern to peer influence. Unlike his counterpart, however, he has two girls enrolled in the program -- with 81 boys. "The imbalance results from peer pressure from their girlfriends," he says. "And the boys give them grief."

A closer look at this teacher's attitude suggests that there are other sources of "grief" for female agriculture students at this school. "We interview freshmen," he says of his recruitment process, "to make sure they're really interested in the program. We're especially interested in interviewing girls. We want to make sure they're not taking it because of their boyfriends. I'm a life-long resident of this community. I know these kids and what they can achieve."

This teacher declares, with obvious sincerity, that his program has "something to offer to both boys and girls," and claims to welcome young women into his program. But his non-sexist claims do not seem to inform his actions. He gave a number of examples of what good students can do in agriculture programs -- all were male. In contrast, his example of a female student was "a real weirdo -- dyed her hair green for St. Patrick's Day." He says that he treats boys and girls as equals, but adds, "They have to work, too -- not just stand by and watch a boy do their work for them." The deep-rooted belief in the prospects for female success in male-dominated occupations does not seem to exist here. And, in fact, there seems to be little non-traditional hiring in the community served by the school. As the Business teacher in the same school said, "In stores, all the meat cutters are men and all the cashiers are women. There is little chance for (female) advancement. There are women with college educations working in the factories."

It is difficult to determine the extent to which the local opportunity structure shapes the attitudes of vocational teachers. But it is clear that vocational teachers can have an impact on the local job market -- and that their view of women in non-traditional occupations is important to the kind of impact they have. A printing teacher at a Vermont Area Vocational Center indicated what can be done. "I think I've broken the barrier," he says. Seven years ago, he tried to place a young woman in a co-operative program with a local printer.

The printer refused to take a girl. But the teacher had been around a long time, and knew the printers well. He forced the issue. "I gave him a few choice printer's words," he says, "and he took her on." The printer later hired the young woman and now says that he couldn't get along without her. In a small business community, word travels fast. The instructor does not expect to have any problems placing female apprentices again.

Obviously, a number of factors went into this small success story. The instructor was an established member of the local community and could not be dismissed as a wild-eyed newcomer. He is male, which appears to have some positive influence on non-traditional employment. He had worked with local printers for awhile before he placed his first female apprentice, and was thus able to overcome initial resistance with the sheer weight of his prior relationships with those employers. But at the root of his success seems to be his belief in the capacity of women to do sound work in any field. "The girls have proven they can handle it," he says. "There's no great difficulty in mechanical ability. Boys sham more -- girls make awful mistakes, because they're less afraid to make them. But then you can teach from them." He proudly displays a beautiful cookbook his class designed and printed. "I would never have gotten that from boys -- I don't care what anyone says!"

Belief in women's capacities can help an instructor break through employment barriers. But the converse is, evidently, equally true. In one southern New Hampshire community, where junior high school girls are still required to take Home Economics while the boys take compulsory Shop, the few girls who enroll in Industrial Arts classes at the high school level are not taken seriously. "We had a separate course for girls a few years ago," the teacher says. "It was geared differently. They had easier projects -- made pin holders and things." He has a few girls in his classes now, but does not see their skills as useful in a vocational context. "Cindy is in Home Maintenance," he says. "She can

learn how to fix irons and sewing machines. She seems to enjoy it, even though she doesn't get too much out of it." The school's principal makes the same kind of distinctions about the girls in the Small Engines class; "The girls do well on the tests," he says, "but they are not comparable as to actual mechanics and application." A few "choice printer's words" might well be applied to attitudes such as these. But they are not uncommon in rural schools, and serve to reinforce the traditional sex-stereotyping that exists in rural communities.

Although there was a great deal of evidence that teachers can shape peer group attitudes towards formerly stereotyped vocational training, most of the professionals in the survey felt that peer influences operate independent of anything a teacher can do. These pressures, they said, are generally negative, in that they reinforce the traditional and stereotyped views of the community, and discourage girls from enrolling in atypical programs. Most teachers had stories about how the boys treat girls in male-dominated programs, which they told with disapproval. The girls, however, seem generally to have worked out a means of dealing with harrassment -- a combination of outrage and humor which seems to get them through the year. One girl, in a shop class in an extremely traditional school, said of her male classmates, "We get along good." But then she adds: "I had all the wires on my project and they pulled them out. I was so mad. Electrical work is hard -- and they did it just to be funny." In another school, the Metal Trades teacher says of his female student, "She gets some flak from the boys -- but she just ignores it or gives it back. Whether or not their position as permanent target has serious psychological costs is not clear. The girls who get up the nerve to enroll at all seem to handle peer harrassment well.

A number of teachers reported modification in the attitudes of boys in classes where there have been female students, even if only a few. A Metal Trades teacher says, "Boys react quite well to girls -- they were a little paternalistic at first, but the attitude wore off when they found the girls were

better molders by far." The girls in that program report that harrassment has diminished, and they seem willing to interpret reduced teasing as welcome.

Just as there are limits on an instructor's capacity to mold peer attitudes, there are limits to the vocational program's capacity to alter attitudes in the job market. While rural teachers, at least those who have been around for awhile, can have a great impact on their communities, this impact is often balanced by the resistance of the rural community to non-traditional approaches to employment. One Business teacher told a story which she says is typical of her area: "One bank called the other day and said they were looking to hire a boy they could eventually move up into a managerial position. I said, 'We have three girls who have straight A's.' They insisted on a boy -- they didn't want a teller, they said. I had to give them a boy with a C average." Other teachers told similar stories of employer intransigence -- which is often backed by the attitudes of families and friends.

When the local employment market is closed to women with non-traditional skills, pressure for out-migration is strong. One vocational counselor summed up a common attitude: "My guess is, Joe at the local shop would take a boy over a girl, no matter what. But big companies are crying for women. They've got to get their Federal money and meet their quotas -- they'll scoop 'em up." This situation is fine for the girls who want to leave their home communities, but it is a clear disincentive to those whose primary desire is to stay where they are. In some schools, teachers reported student reluctance (especially among girls) to travel as far as the nearest medium-size town to work; the transition from the rural school to a slightly more cosmopolitan workplace causes a crisis of confidence in many of her female students, one teacher told us. "They don't refuse those jobs because of lack of skills -- the banks would rather have our students -- but because of the life style." In the context of this kind of reluctance to leave the familiar, it is clear that if non-traditional training requires leaving

the area to use one's skills, many young women are unlikely to want it, even if they have appropriate talents.

This study of the current status of rural women's vocational education has not produced a particularly optimistic picture. Young women with complex (and often incompatible) desires for their future grow up in conservative communities served by schools with limited vocational training options. If they choose traditional female sex-stereotyped programs, they are likely to be stuck in low-paid jobs which do not use their talents. If they choose male-stereotyped training, they are likely to have to leave their home areas or struggle to find a place among reluctant employers. If they have access to a sex-neutral program, choosing it is likely to prepare them for a very limited number of local jobs. In addressing the needs of rural women, vocational programs find themselves whip-sawed -- torn between the pressures of the state and federal governments and the express desires of the community. Often, the specific needs of female students become merely the rope in this value-laden tug-of-war. It is no wonder that rural high school girls are often confused about their vocational future. It is no wonder that vocational directors tend to sigh heavily when asked to talk about their programs and plans for women's education.

* * *

*Jackie has lived all her seventeen years in a small Vermont town and plans to stay there. "I went to New York City once," she says. "Down there I'd live in constant fear of getting mugged or raped -- you have to keep your door locked all the time. No, I definitely want to stay around here."*

*She has definite plans for work as well. She has already done some waitressing, and is sure she wouldn't want that for the rest of her life, "you get sick being around food all the time." Nor would she want "a constant typing job," though her Business Occupations teacher praises her skill in typing. What she really likes best is "working*

*with people, like working in a bank out front." She is studying bookkeeping and shorthand and computer programming because they should help her get the kind of job she wants; they'll "look good." Her teacher considers her one of his best all-around Business students, and feels she has excellent chances of being hired by one of the banks in the area. He takes care that his students understand the fine points of getting a job, like employers' preference for skirts and stockings rather than jeans. Jackie knows how to be poised and confident in an interview, and has already had several promising ones for summer work.*

*Jackie also knows that her best employment opportunities will be outside her own town, in one of the more sophisticated communities ten and fifteen miles south. While her guidance counselor feels that employers in those towns like to have rurally-raised workers because of their "high moral values," Jackie has encountered some "snotty" attitudes, which she attributes to the fact that she lives in the country. Unlike some of her classmates who worry about how they'll "stack up" against more cosmopolitan candidates for jobs, Jackie is not intimidated. "I don't feel anybody should be walked all over. After all, I'm doing them an equal favor." She expects the bank she'd most like to work for, the area's largest, "will probably treat me on an equal level."*

*Her determination to stay in her home town while working at a good job down the road has raised the problem of transportation. Jackie has this all figured out, too, at least for the summer. At her father's suggestion, she bought a Moped. It was a matter of having to "decide priorities." This purchase meant that she didn't have the money to go on the Honors English class trip to England. But she enjoys her bike. "At first, people were talking like anything," she says with glee. "They were really shocked!"*

This kind of notoriety is "funny" to Jackie, who sees no reason why a girl shouldn't ride a Moped. But on more serious issues she declares herself more traditional. She feels, for example, that the wife should take major responsibility for housework and child-rearing in a marriage. One of her teachers has a husband who stays home to care for their small child; Jackie says she admires this, but adds quickly that she wouldn't want her own husband to do such a thing: "It would make me feel awkward. It's as if he's not quite as manly, you know?" Still, she would like help with the dishes, and perhaps other tasks so that "you could both go out and have fun - so it's not just him going off fishing and hunting." Jackie feels the concept of compromise is important in a marriage. She and her boyfriend Peter have worked out "pretty much the same ideas," she says, "though we used to fight a lot."

One of the things Jackie and Peter agree on is marrying and having their children young. Jackie notes that this is a common pattern in her town, where "everybody knows everybody else." Although the teachers and advisers at her school counsel waiting, she feels having children at an early age can be a good thing. "My parents are pretty young, and we're really close. We have a great time. You can have more fun with your kids if you're nearer their age." Accordingly, she hopes to have hers early and "pretty close together," but not too many: "maybe two . . . it's hard to pay for kids. It's not fair to have more than you can afford."

Another thing Jackie and Peter share is this recognition that raising children is expensive. "Peter wants me to work," Jackie says. "We couldn't afford just one person's salary. . . . Usually you have to have both working." Peter plans to set up his own lumber operation,

*because "he loves to work outside and be independent"; Jackie plans to return to work after having her children. She realizes that she will then need someone else to care for them, and is hopeful of finding someone like Peter's sister, who "takes in seven or eight kids along with her own. I certainly wouldn't leave them with anybody I didn't trust."*

*Jackie's confidence in her ability to create the future she wants extends even to the details of her home. She and Peter have their eye on some land to buy, and plan to build their own house. "Right now we'd just put up the shell, work a bit at a time." But in ten years, Jackie sees herself "in a nice house - that's the biggest goal - with a couple of kids and a good job." When a friend points out that she hasn't mentioned a husband in this vision, she says, "Oh! I just figure the husband comes with the house. . . . Gee," she says and laughs, "I don't sound very liberated, do I?"*

* * *

Looking to the Future: Prospects and Programs

While the present status of rural women in the labor market is distressingly low, the situation is not hopeless. There is much that vocational education programs and personnel can do to prepare young rural women for interesting and varied labor market participation. Among the schools in this small study, we found a number of promising ideas being tested and implemented. With enhanced communication among rural schools, some coordination and adaptation of programs might fruitfully occur.

Several steps could be taken to make vocational programs more relevant to the specific needs of rural high school students:

1) Design and adopt courses which will help rural high school students to develop realistic and thoughtful career orientations for themselves. This is

particularly important for rural girls, who do not tend to get adequate counseling through the customary structures. The POI study found that, as compared to males, female high school students tend to get little help in career planning -- from guidance counselors, teachers, or parents -- thus reducing the likelihood that they will be able to achieve ambitions which require complex or long-term training. The non-college bound girl, who is most likely to be enrolled in a secondary school vocational program, tended to be the least likely of anyone in her peer group to get advice at all (Dunne, et al., 1978).

Teachers and counselors agreed that some kind of career planning program was important for these young women. Vocational counselors said that most non-college bound girls make no particular career plans, in contrast to young men. "Most of the girls plan on being married three or four years after high school -- unless they are pregnant," one principal said, reflecting a general assessment of female ambitions. "A lot of girls want to achieve," a guidance counselor at another school noted, "but they have this fall-back -- 'I can always marry some rich, good-looking guy.'" Since this "fall-back" in most rural areas is about as useful as depending on winning the state lottery, it does a real disservice to girls who use it as a basis for life planning.

The girls, themselves, generally projected a vague career, supplemented by fairly detailed plans for husband-home-family. Many were able to tell us more about the number of children they plan to have in 1990 than about the kind of job they will look for next year. Further, some of those with concrete career plans had little notion of what those plans entailed. One girl said that she wants to "get a little pet shop," because she likes animals and has raised several of her own. But she does not know anything about running a small business, and it has not occurred to her that such information might be useful to obtain. "I'll get an accountant," she says breezily, and giggles.

Obviously, girls like this need help in planning their lives. They need to learn to deal with the contradictions implicit in the juxtaposition of traditional

values and contemporary pressures. Young women need to recognize that they cannot simultaneously be Olivia Walton and Mary Tyler Moore. Choices must be made. Further, they need to plan a future, rather than to assume that it will reveal itself to them. Girls who want a career need to know where training is to be found, what obstacles might stand in between them and satisfactory employment, and how those obstacles might be overcome. For many, the place to have this reality orientation is in high school, where many problems and conflicts can be worked through in a supportive and sheltered environment.

Teachers and guidance counselors suggested a variety of ways in which this kind of training can be accomplished. Several schools offer formal courses which encourage career planning, or which compel students to look at the realistic implications of certain decisions they might make. There is at least one commercially available curriculum, developed by a team led by this author, which is used -- in various adaptations -- by some of the schools in the study. This course, called "Options": A Career Development Curriculum for Rural High School Students (Dunne, et al., 1980) uses case studies and simulations to teach high school girls and boys ways of confronting career and family choices. Other teachers have developed similar curricula of their own. Several teachers said that courses in "Marriage and the Family" serve this function, since they focus on the reality, rather than the romance, of family life. "They begin questioning early marriage when we come to budgeting," one Home Economics teacher said. "This course has changed a lot of minds about getting married right after high school. Both boys and girls decided to postpone it, or not marry at this point in their lives."

Other teachers felt that courses at the high school level come too late to do a great deal of good. One counselor in an Area Vocational Center said that non-stereotyped career orientation must come early if girls are to be expected to make sound plans in high school. As one principal commented, "The sex

divisions are in the culture these girls come from," and there are limitations to the impact school curriculum can have.

Nevertheless, most teachers seemed to feel that courses have a useful, if limited role in the orientation of girls to the outside world. Several teachers agreed with the woman who said that classwork was most likely to have an impact if it was bolstered by role models -- favorite teachers who demonstrate non-traditional family styles. "Men on this faculty are not afraid to do traditional women's work," one teacher said. "There are fathers taking care of kids -- this kind of example is very important." In rural communities, where the life styles of faculty members is likely to be well-known to students (and to their parents), this kind of modeling can be a useful teaching tool.

2) Encourage young women to consider non-traditional careers. Principals and vocational directors at every school in this study declared with vigor that their programs are open to both males and females. But there is a gap, and sometimes a gulf, between openness and encouragement. In one school, the Shop teacher says, "I say they're welcome, but maybe they're afraid of me. I'm pretty strict. One girl was going to take my course this year, but she didn't. She would have been the only girl." In another school, the Metal Work teacher made sure that the sole female freshman in his course was placed with the sole senior girl, encouraging them to help and support one another. In both cases, the official posture is welcoming; in practice, the differences are obvious.

The data gathered for this study suggest that effective female recruitment in rural schools is entirely possible. Taking vocational agriculture as an example, we have seen that marked differences in female enrollment appear to stem from differences in instructor's attitudes and in their willingness to organize courses which include "female" subjects of interest (such as horticulture). In fact, vocational agriculture might well serve as a model for non-traditional recruiting. It has been a male bastion for nearly 100 years, but it is also

amenable to broad interpretation in terms of the skills it teaches. VoAg instructors could spearhead a positive effort to recruit young women, and serve as a model for broadening the focus of other traditionally male training programs.

Vocational education teachers and counselors need to be told that career choices are not made entirely on the basis of peer and family influence. They need to be confronted with the evidence of successful non-traditional enrollment efforts, so that they can stop attributing exclusively to the rural culture attitudes which they often share themselves.

3) Re-educate rural vocational teachers and employers about the potential of women in non-traditional occupations. It will not be enough simply to inform vocational teachers that they can attract women to non-traditional programs. They need help in planning strategies for recruitment, support, and training of women who are ready for characteristically male careers. There is already significant pressure on vocational programs to raise their female enrollments; many teachers and administrators reported a sense of frustration at the lack of positive suggestions to back up the implicit threats. "They get carried away and put stickers on our books (indicating sex-stereotyped material)," one teacher said. "It's not our fault." Workshops and other in-service training activities might reduce frustration and enhance the effectiveness of recruitment programs.

It seems likely that the best instructors for such workshops would be rural vocational teachers who have dealt effectively with problems of female recruitment and support. They have had first-hand experience in dealing with the problems which keep girls out of non-traditional occupations, and with the values of rural communities which reinforce those problems. Further, they are likely to have high credibility with other rural vocational teachers who might reasonably dismiss urban-based vocational instructors, or people who have never wrestled with the complex problems of vocational education. Finally, the use of rural vocational teachers to train others like themselves will give some credit and visibility to

those who have pioneered non-traditional female training -- credit many of them could use to keep them going in what is often an uphill struggle.

The re-education of teachers is only the first step, however. It must be coupled by the re-education of employers. There is little use (and perhaps some negative impact) in making young women feel welcome in non-traditional programs if they are going to be unemployable when they are trained. Since many vocational teachers have strong ties among employers, it is probably best to leave the community education function to local staff. One vocational teacher, a man with a good record of non-traditional job placement, says that "one-to-one co-op placements have the most local effect," probably because he makes sure that every successful experience is widely reported in the community. Once again, it is unreasonable to expect that every vocational teacher will automatically know how to re-educate the local employers; materials and direct instruction must be provided to help with these efforts.

4) Develop more sex-neutral programs. In spite of the problems associated with sex-neutral programs in rural areas, such as labor market saturation and community resistance, they are worth serious attention. First, there is some evidence that more occupations are coming to be regarded as sex-neutral among rural young people, thus expanding the boundaries of this category. One school in our sample reported that the local Area Vocational Center's Printing and Graphics program had "become more neutral" during the last few years, in spite of its traditional male bias. No one could say why, except to note general changes in society and the employment market which have encouraged young women to enroll in the program. Several schools reported similar changes in the perception of Foods courses, as restaurant work becomes a more fashionable occupational option for young men.

An analysis of enrollment patterns in Vermont and New Hampshire vocational programs (post-secondary as well as secondary) seems to confirm local perceptions

of a broadened view. While most courses were still polarized; a substantial number fell into a mixed-enrollment category. These included courses in accounting and management, data processing and computer programming, printing and graphics, health technician programs (other than nursing, although there seems to be some movement of young men into that traditionally female-dominated field), landscaping and horticulture, bartending, real estate, natural resource management, and quantity foods preparation. If sharply polarized perceptions of occupations are beginning to disintegrate, it would be wise for secondary school programs to encourage that trend. The very existence of sex-neutral programs breaks into the conception of "natural divisions" between men's and women's work, and weakens the barriers maintained by that perceived division.

Further, sex-neutral programs offer young women the opportunity to upgrade their occupational status without violating the traditional norms of their communities, or the expectations of their peers. A young woman who would never consider trying to be a welder might well prosper as a restaurant chef, or as a greenhouse manager. And the existence in a community of mixed-sex employment within one occupational category paves the way for mixed-sex employment in less conventionally acceptable jobs.

Some schools attempt to resolve the problems inherent in sex-neutral programs by designing "cluster programs" in large categories like "Protective Services," or "Human Services." They reason that, even though these programs are made up of actual jobs which have traditionally been polarized (fireman/meter maid; nurse's aide/ambulance driver), the co-existence of boys and girls within a general course of study will begin to break down those distinctions. It is difficult to say how successful this approach has been; in our sample, the schools were in the initial stages of developing such programs and had no evidence of their success and failure.

5) Develop programs to train women entrepreneurs. There is some good

evidence that small business may be a most promising field for rural women (Teal, 1980). Many rural areas are presently experiencing a wave of in-migration from metropolitan places (Beale, 1976), providing an excellent market for new business. Even in places where the population is not rising, a history of under-service in rural communities often makes small business development plausible. Women can profit from these opportunities.

Small business and service enterprises are well-suited to rural women's needs and interests for a variety of reasons. They do not require an enlightened employer; they do not require large capital outlay; they can benefit from some traditional rural female strengths: independence, self-sufficiency, willingness to put in long hours of work. They also permit women who want to develop traditional "women's skills" to make a reasonable living. For example, many young rural women would like to be beauticians. They invest a great deal of time and money in the training programs required for licensing, and are then faced with the problem of finding a job in a beauty parlor (often far from home). When they do find a job, most of their receipts go to an employer. If a young woman knows how to set up a small business, she might be able to open a small shop of her own, catering to local needs and permitting her to achieve income, autonomy, and use-fulness to her community. But beauticians' training does not prepare anyone to run a business. Specific programs need to be designed to provide that kind of training.

While some teachers interviewed for this study felt that there was little room for small-scale private enterprise in their communities, others felt that this attitude indicated lack of imagination, not opportunity. One assistant principal said, "I once made a list of twenty-two things youngsters could do to supplement income in their own towns. The gas crunch is going to drive people back to the towns, to more self-sufficiency. If I had federal money, I'd set up a coordinator in each town to set up small businesses. There are a million things

they could do right in town -- paint and repair houses, glaze windows, repair small machines. . . ." One school has launched a small business program under the general rubric of Vocational Agriculture; others are considering similar steps. Many teachers are not prepared to teach such programs, however. One Home Economics teacher said that there was a real need for day care centers in her community, but had no idea how to teach the business skills required to start one. She felt perfectly prepared to teach a Child Care course, but could not teach subjects about which she knew little.

If small businesses are to be a genuine opportunity for women, money and expertise must be made available to provide the training required. These are not impenetrable skills, available only to graduates of the Harvard Business School. But they need to be packaged and made available to rural schools and to the rural women -- young and mature -- who need them.

6) Design programs which will teach women to use their skills for supplementary income. Many rural women want to maintain their primary identity as homemakers and mothers. The bulk of the girls surveyed for the POI study said they felt that mothers of young children should not work outside the home; many said that they would prefer not to work until their children are full-grown. But many of these same women will want (or need) to earn some money. Programs should be provided to teach young women how to turn skills they already possess into income-producing work.

Many young women, even in these modern times, have learned from their mothers and peers a number of old-fashioned skills -- sewing, canning, quilting, knitting, and other forms of hand work. These can often be used to provide supplementary income. Women who know how to quilt, knit, or make leather goods can earn some money with virtually no overhead costs, working at home, in their spare time. Women who know how to garden and can are capable of running produce stands, or of supplying local markets with home-made or home-grown foods. Other women would

like to learn new skills which could permit them to earn money at home. Students at one school expressed a desire for programs in furniture refinishing and chair caning. A teacher in another school recommended a course in sign-painting, for women with artistic inclinations. Numerous other skills could be identified, each appropriate for part-time, home-based employment.

But these women, like their full-time entrepreneurial sisters, need training in the elements of marketing, accounting, and other small business skills. Craftswomen need to know how to assess the lucrative urban markets, so that their quilts, afghans, or leather belts will appeal to the people who can afford to buy hand-made goods at high prices. They need to learn how to form marketing cooperatives, to get their finished goods to the best retailing outlets. And they need to learn how to prepare income tax returns which maximize the advantages of being in business for themselves. All of these skills can be taught, and the schools seem to be the most reasonable vehicle for teaching them.

These recommendations are just a beginning. But they have an important common element. They assume the existence of a full range of rural women -- from those who want to break into the predominantly male occupations and need help to do that to those who want to maintain a very traditional rural woman's role, but who need to earn a little money around the edges. Further, they assume that rural high school girls should be taught how to make choices, how to plan careers, but that they should not be taught which choices they should make. It is crucial that those of us interested in life preparation for rural women not make the mistake of assuming that "good women" will choose to forsake their traditional values. Much good has stemmed from those values as well as much constraint. It is important that efforts to make options available to rural women not result in the destruction of the rural communities that women have long maintained.

* * *

*"Your size really holds you back on these machines," says Gina, indicating the collection of massive equipment in the Metal Trades*

shop at her Area Vocational Center. "I'm only five-one; my friend who graduated last year was short, too. She got turned down for an apprenticeship and one reason the company told her was she was too short. Like I have to stand on a box to reach the brake on that one over there. So we were thinking -- why not have little crates so you could reach everything? There'd be a way around it . . . if they allowed you to find a way around it."

Gina will finish the two-year program in Mechanical Drafting this year. She started out with an interest in architectural drafting, but found the mechanical aspect "more interesting -- I like to tear things apart." She also enjoys working with machines in order to make the things that she's designed, which is what brings her to the metals shop. She is the only girl in her program at the Center, though there is a younger girl starting Metal Trades this year. With the help of her teacher, Gina acts as a counsellor and model for her; the school staff made sure Gina was working on a machine when the new girl came to the shop for her first day.

This kind of support is valuable in a program where, according to the Center's Coordinator, "boys are a little paternalistic at first" and according to the new girl in Metal Trades, "They don't like a girl in the shop; they think you can't do the job they can do." Gina sometimes feels isolated, but her work absorbs her and keeps her going. She gets support for that work from her drafting teacher, who has had up to 50% girls in past classes. Although he notes that girls "do lack in practical experience," he feels they tend to be "more careful, more precise, more exact" in drafting; they value "nice clean work" more than boys.

Gina looks forward to going on to college because it will help her get ahead in her trade. She expects to get "a B.A. at least" and then

*hopes a company will sponsor her for a Master's degree in engineering. She is bewildered by classmates at her local high school who plan to attend liberal arts colleges: "They're deciding to go and they don't even know what for. Seems like they're just wasting money." She attributes her own practical view of higher education to her mother, a second-grade teacher who has always told her, "You go to school to learn, not to play." And while she says that some of her regular teachers "think Voc. Ed. is for dummies," she refuses to accept that stigma. "I'm in college courses, Physics and things like that -- but I'd rather come here and learn a trade."*

*This ambition springs partly from Gina's observation of her siblings' experiences. She has two older brothers who didn't go to college, but now "wish they had." Her older sister, however, provides the most important example. Although this sister had planned to become a teacher, she gave that up and got married right out of high school. "Now," says Gina, "she's sick of staying home. She's looking for a part-time job, but there isn't much. . . . I don't want that to happen to me." Gina thinks she'd like to marry someday, and then perhaps adopt kids, but work comes first. "I'm going to get something to fall back on -- and then get married. I don't want to get stuck with no skills."*

* * *

APPENDIX I

## Interview Site Selection

Schools were chosen to represent the kind of variation typical in rural New England. Four were small high schools serving single communities; four were regional, serving students from several surrounding towns. Two were Area Vocational Centers; the rest offered a varying number of vocational courses and programs. Four were located in rural communities within easy commuting distance from large employment centers; four were located in remote rural settings, where most employment must be found locally or which require substantial commuting to work. Four of the schools were in Vermont, and four in New Hampshire (highly similar states geographically, but with very different school funding patterns). There were other possible dimensions of variation; these, however, seemed most relevant to the vocational training patterns of youthful residents.

## Interview Procedures

One of two interviewers, both with extensive rural school experience, visited each school for a day. They talked with administrators, vocational teachers (at least one from a traditional female program and one from a traditional male program); guidance counselors (where available); and students enrolled in both male- and female-oriented courses. Where there were programs intended to be sex-neutral, teachers and students in those programs were interviewed also.

Interviews were open-ended, but followed a general outline established by the principal investigator in conjunction with the interviewers. The basic interview outline is included below.

I. Basic Information

A. Statistics

number of students in school in vocational education
number of staff in school, vocational staff

I. A. Statistics (continued)

Number of students who go into job market
Number of students who go into junior college, technical school
Number of students who go into four year college

B. Brief Description of Community

Who lives here?
What do they do?

II. A. What is the Labor Market for Males?

B. What Do Women Do in the Labor Market?

What do adult women, presently in the labor market, do?
What are the opportunities for female graduates -- any new opportunities?

C. How Do You Prepare Females for Employment?

1. Nature of vocational education programs

2. Distribution of females in programs

D. Aspirations of Females

What do they want? What do they get?

III. Analysis of Situation ("Problem")

Lack of opportunities?
Lack of family and community support systems?
Values and attitudes?
Others?

IV. Role of Vocational Education

A. 1. Impact of Title IX

2. Efforts to enroll females in non-traditional programs

B. Difficulties

"Atmosphere"?
Conflict with opportunity structure?
Polarization -- only highly sex-typed programs?

V. What Could Be Done?

A. What about:

1. Neutral occupations (not presently sex-stereotyped by students), i.e., food services, accounting, distributive education

V. A. What about: (continued)

2. High levels of stereotyped occupations

3. Entrepreneurship

4. Home/cottage industry. If doing training for these, <u>how</u>? For <u>girls</u>?

B. Other suggestions?

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